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ABSTRACT

This chapter traces the evolution of the concept of diversity in higher education, noting the real but slow progress in achieving greater inclusion. It highlights Harvard University's experiences, demonstrating why the goal of diversity remains so important to the actual quality and breadth of education for all students and why Harvard's existing policies offer an effective pathway to the future. It begins by discussing the early origins of diversity, then examines civil rights legislation and the Supreme Court's 1978 decision in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, which addressed both the legality of racial quotas in admissions and the use of race or ethnicity as factors in admissions decisions. The next section discusses policy alternatives concerning student diversity and admissions in the post-Bakke era, commenting on several arguments advanced by critics of affirmative action in college admissions (e.g., affirmative action programs highlight the wrong target, run the risk of stigmatizing and thus injuring the very people they are supposed to help, and are unfair because they deny admission to students with high test scores in favor of students with less impressive objective records). The importance of strengthening and sustaining higher education's commitment to diversity is stressed. (Contains 25 endnotes.) (SM)

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CHAPTER 1

# Student Diversity and Higher Learning

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## Introduction

Few issues have aroused more contentious debate over the past decade than those surrounding the importance of diversity in higher education, and the related use of affirmative action in admissions decisions. The controversy swirling around these topics has intensified significantly since 1996, when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that the University of Texas could not consider race as a factor in its law-school admissions in *Hopwood v. State of Texas*. A series of subsequent legal decisions and public referenda outlawing the use of race-conscious admissions policies has created a climate of ferment and uncertainty within the higher education community.

In a debate that is too often framed by the competing interests of different groups, it is all the more important that we remember the most fundamental rationale for student diversity in higher education: its educational value. Students benefit in countless ways from the opportunity to live and learn among peers whose perspectives and experiences differ from their own. A diverse educational environment challenges them to explore ideas and arguments at a deeper level—to see issues from various sides, to rethink their own premises, and to achieve the kind of understanding that comes only from testing their own hypotheses against those of people with opposing views.

In the pages that follow, I briefly trace the evolution of the concept of diversity in higher education in this country, and the very real—if slow and uneven—progress that has been made in achieving greater inclusion, drawing in particular on the experiences at Harvard. My intention in do-

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ing so is to demonstrate why the goal of diversity remains so important to the actual quality and breadth of education for all our students, and why our existing policies continue to offer the most effective and promising pathway to the future.

### Early Origins of the Notion of Diversity

Contrary to popular belief, the deliberate, conscious effort to achieve greater student diversity on our campuses was not born in the 1960s. In fact, it reaches back to the mid-nineteenth century, when issues of racial, ethnic, and other forms of diversity were no less volatile in American life than they are today. At Harvard, the coming of the Civil War prompted some of the earliest comments on the subject. President Cornelius C. Felton recognized an urgent need for universities to reach out more consciously to students from different parts of the country because gathering such students "must tend powerfully to remove prejudices by bringing them into friendly relations."

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot expanded the concept of diversity, which he believed to be a defining feature of American democratic society. He sought to attract students from a variety of "nations, states, schools, families, sects and conditions of life" so they could experience "the wholesome influence that comes from observation of and contact with people different from themselves." Eliot identified the "great diversity in the population of the United States as regards racial origins" as a critical element in America's heterogeneous society.

While the goals of Felton, Eliot, and other educators may strike many as irrelevant to our present circumstances, the essential principles they espoused helped to pry open the doors of Harvard, along with many other higher education institutions, to children of new immigrants, to members of religious minorities, and, in smaller numbers, to African Americans. One black student, W. E. B. Du Bois, class of 1890, wrote that Harvard "was no longer simply a place where rich and learned New England gave its accolade to the social elite. It had broken its shell and reached to the West and to the South, to yellow students and to black."

In reality, however, African Americans, Jews, Latinos, Native Americans, and others continued to find only limited ports of entry into excellent educational institutions during most of the first half of the twentieth century. This situation began to shift dramatically in the aftermath of World War II, with the introduction of the GI bill and the initiation of active efforts at Harvard to recruit students from rural, urban, and suburban

areas across the country, and with a wide array of talents. By the 1950s and 1960s, student diversity came to be seen as a value in its own right, enhancing the experiences of an entire educational community. At Harvard, student diversity was seen as "stimulating to the Faculty" and "more relevant to liberal education."[1] Moreover, each new class was viewed increasingly as an ensemble, rather than as a simple aggregation of individuals chosen without any significant reference to the pattern produced by the whole. The Harvard admissions policy statement of that era wrote of the student body as an "educational resource of coordinate importance with our faculty and our library, laboratory and housing arrangements."[2] It suggested that the "measure of a class" consists largely in "how much its members are likely to learn from each other—the real beginning of learning, both intellectually and emotionally."[3]

### Civil Rights Legislation and the *Bakke* Case

During the 1960s, lingering social, ethnic, and racial barriers to higher education were shattered at an unprecedented speed. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (and related initiatives) represented a major attempt by the federal government to promote equal opportunity for all Americans. Under this act, admissions (and other specific activities) in colleges and universities that received federal funding became subject to requirements of nondiscrimination. The legislative history of the act reveals deep and passionate divisions in both the Congress and the country. Proponents argued that government had a special responsibility to make certain that programs and activities supported by federal funds were free of discrimination. Opponents foresaw a future in which controversies about race or ethnicity—and later about gender—would create continuing unrest, discontent, and litigation.

As in the case of any genuine dilemma, the real issues were beyond immediate resolution, and they contained the seeds of ongoing disagreement. In higher education, a variety of programs related to affirmative action were designed during the late 1960s and 1970s. Some of these programs soon met with legal challenges. Perhaps the most conspicuous involved the University of California, in a case brought by Allan Bakke. In 1978, the Supreme Court issued in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* what remains its most significant statement concerning questions of race and admissions in higher education.

At issue in this case was the policy employed by the Medical School of the University of California at Davis of reserving sixteen of the one hundred places in each class for members of certain minority groups.

Candidates for these spaces were considered separately from others, and were held to a different standard of admissions. The process was largely quantitative in nature, involving the use of precise "benchmark" scores and "cutoff" points. Bakke contended that, as a white student, he had been unfairly excluded from competing for one of the sixteen places reserved for minorities, even though his test scores and other indices were stronger than those of students admitted under the special admissions program.

The *Bakke* case set a precedent because it directly addressed both the legality of quotas, or set-asides, in admissions, and the use of race or ethnicity as factors in admissions decisions. The Court decided, in a 5-4 vote, that the clear separation of eighty-four "regular" admissions places from sixteen "special" places for minorities, together with the use of different numerical cutoff points for the two groups, was unlawful.

Several of the justices' opinions[4] restated the view that racial categories and preferences—even if "benign" in purpose—are problematic, given the broad and unqualified language of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. While the original initiative that led to the Amendment's adoption in 1868—and ultimately to the Civil Rights Act of 1964—was clearly intended to break systematic patterns of discrimination against African Americans, the basic constitutional and legislative goals involved equal protection for *all* persons, whatever their race.

In his pivotal opinion in *Bakke*, Justice Lewis Powell concluded that "racial and ethnic distinctions of any sort are inherently suspect and thus call for the most exacting judicial examination."[5] However, he also wrote—and a majority of the Court concurred—that it was permissible to take race explicitly into account as one factor in making university admissions decisions, provided that the institution can show that the practice is necessary to promote a substantial interest.[6]

This particular aspect of Justice Powell's opinion was, of course, extraordinarily significant. The California Superior Court and the Supreme Court of California (both of which had previously decided in favor of Bakke) had specifically declared racial considerations to be impermissible in admissions decisions. By contrast, Justice Powell stated clearly that conscious consideration of race or ethnicity in decisionmaking is not intrinsically unconstitutional, even though its use must be strictly circumscribed:

> In enjoining petitioner [the University of California] from ever considering the race of any applicant, the courts below failed to recognize that the State has a substantial interest that may legitimately be served

> by a properly devised admissions program involving the competitive consideration of race and ethnic origin.[7]

In addressing the question of what constitutes a sufficiently substantial interest, Justice Powell rejected several arguments advanced by the University of California.[8] The only rationale that he found persuasive was based directly on educational grounds: the presence of minority students contributed—along with the presence and contributions of other students—to diversity, and therefore to the total educational environment of an institution, as well as to the education of all its members. In short, he judged some consideration of racial and ethnic characteristics to be appropriate, because "the interest of diversity is compelling in the context of a university's admissions program."[9]

Justice Powell grounded this conclusion in part on the longstanding definition of academic freedom used by Justice Frankfurter in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*:

> It is the business of a university to provide that atmosphere which is most conducive to speculation, experiment and creation. It is an atmosphere in which there prevail "the four essential freedoms" of a university—to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.[10]

In his discussion of these issues, Justice Powell emphasized both the "robust exchange of ideas"[11] of special concern to the First Amendment, and the broader concept of student exposure to the "mores"—the customs, habits, and outlooks—of fellow students who are "as diverse as this Nation of many peoples."[12] While the educational benefits of such exposure may appear to be most striking during a student's university years, their long-term significance was held to be equally valuable: "The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained" in this way,[13] and the results of such training can have a lasting effect on individuals, and therefore on the society of which they are a part.

If it is permissible to take race and ethnicity into account as one factor in an admissions process, but generally not permissible to "set aside" places (or to use a set of differently defined standards) exclusively for members of a particular ethnic or racial group (or groups), how can one design and administer an appropriate process? In *Bakke*, the Justices devoted considerable attention to this issue.

Justice Powell quoted Harvard College's policy statement on admissions extensively in his opinion and included it in full as an appendix.

This policy carried the strong endorsement of President Derek Bok, whose constant efforts on behalf of diversity and affirmative action helped to determine Harvard's goals and extend its progress throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Two passages from the Harvard statement are particularly pertinent. The first concerns the way in which different criteria can be weighed simultaneously in making admissions decisions; the second concerns the question of so-called critical mass, including the issue of quotas as contrasted to approximate (and flexible) goals:

> When the Committee on Admissions reviews the large middle group of applicants who are "admissible" and deemed capable of doing good work in their courses, the race of an applicant may tip the balance in his favor just as geographic origin or a life spent on a farm may tip the balance in other candidates' cases. . . .
>
> In Harvard College admissions the [Admissions] Committee has not set target-quotas for the number of blacks, or of musicians, football players, physicists or Californians to be admitted in a given year. At the same time the Committee is aware that if Harvard College is to provide a truly heterog[e]neous environment that reflects the rich diversity of the United States, it cannot be provided without some attention to numbers. It would not make sense, for example, to have 10 or 20 students out of 1,100 whose homes are west of the Mississippi. Comparably, 10 or 20 black students could not begin to bring to their classmates and to each other the variety of points of view, backgrounds and experiences of blacks in the United States. . . . Consequently, when making its decisions, the Committee on Admissions is aware that there is some relationship between numbers and achieving the benefits to be derived from a diverse student body, and between numbers and providing a reasonable environment for those students admitted.[14]

Distinctions between the Harvard College program and the University of California at Davis program were discussed in some detail in *Bakke*. Justice Harry Blackmun wrote that, while he saw the advantages of the Harvard program, he was not convinced that the difference between the two was "very profound or constitutionally significant." He concluded that the Harvard program was "better formulated than Davis' two-track system," but added:

> The cynical, of course, may say that under a program such as Harvard's one may accomplish covertly what Davis concedes it does openly. I need not go that far, for despite its two-track aspect, the Davis program, for me, is within constitutional bounds, though perhaps barely so.[15]

In his opinion, however, Justice Powell insisted on the fundamental difference between a two-track process involving set-asides and a unitary process that judged all candidates by the same set of criteria:

> In such an admissions program, race or ethnic background may be deemed a "plus" in a particular applicant's file, yet it does not insulate the individual from comparison with all other candidates for the available seats. The file of a particular black applicant may be examined for his potential contribution to diversity without the factor of race being decisive when compared, for example, with that of an applicant identified as an Italian-American if the latter is thought to exhibit qualities more likely to promote beneficial educational pluralism. Such qualities could include exceptional personal talents, unique work or service experience, leadership potential, maturity, demonstrated compassion, [or] a history of overcoming disadvantage. . . . Indeed, the weight attributed to a particular quality may vary from year to year depending upon the "mix" both of the student body and the applicants for the incoming class.

Finally, it is important to note that Justice Powell considered the contribution of diversity to education at the graduate as well as the undergraduate level. He viewed law schools, for example, not only as academic institutions, but as "the proving ground for legal learning and practice"—places that "cannot be effective in isolation from the individuals and institutions with which the law interacts. Few students and no one who has practiced law would choose to study in an academic vacuum."[16]

A similar perspective was relevant to medicine. "Physicians serve a heterogeneous population," wrote Justice Powell, and

> an otherwise qualified medical student with a particular background —whether it be ethnic, geographic, culturally advantaged or disadvantaged—may bring to a professional school of medicine experiences, outlooks, and ideas that enrich the training of its student body and better equip its graduates to render with understanding their vital service to humanity.[17]

This important issue—of graduate and professional school admissions—deserves at least some additional discussion. Generalizing about admissions criteria across very different disciplines is obviously difficult, because programs vary widely in the nature of the required preparation. A Ph.D. program in statistics or plasma fusion, for instance, will undoubtedly have technical requirements for admission that would ordinarily not have clear parallels in a program in English literature or European history.

Nonetheless, if we want a society in which our lawyers, physicians, teachers, architects, public servants, and other professionals possess a developed sense of vocation and calling; if we want them to appreciate and understand the variety of human beings with whom they will work, and whom they will serve; if we want them to think imaginatively and to act effectively in relation to the needs and values of their communities, then we shall have to take diversity into account as one among many significant factors in graduate and professional school admissions and education. Relevant academic training and expertise, while indispensable, can take one only so far in many of the situations that are now the substance of everyday professional life, and the realities of our time require forms of education that are broad in their human dimensions as well as powerful in their intellectual content.

### Admissions: Alternatives in a Post-*Bakke* Era

As we move further into the post-*Bakke* era, we must consider various policy alternatives concerning student diversity and admissions. We can continue with admissions policies that take many individual qualities and factors into careful account (including a person's ethnicity, race, or gender). These policies have served us extremely well for a very long time, and have enhanced the educational mission of our universities.

Alternatively, institutions may choose on their own to take less account of race, ethnicity, and gender in admissions; or they may find themselves prohibited from doing so by legislative or judicial actions at either the state or federal level—referenda in California and Washington have banned the use of affirmative action at public institutions of higher education in those states. The University of Michigan currently faces two separate court challenges to its admissions policies. It is entirely possible that the Supreme Court will soon accept a challenge to affirmative action that could determine the legality of using race-conscious measures in every public institution of higher education in the country.[18]

My own view—as suggested throughout these pages—is that the main question to be addressed in this context is not so much affirmative action itself, but the broader matter of diversity as it relates to the quality, breadth, and texture of student learning. The primary purpose of diversity in university admissions, moreover, is neither to achieve abstract goals nor to compensate for patterns of past societal discrimination. It represents now, as it has since the mid-nineteenth century, positive educational values that are fundamental to the basic mission of colleges and

universities. It is also, as I have emphasized, extremely important to the development of civic virtues—and of future leaders—vital to the health and effective functioning of our democracy.

The most constructive and well-conceived admissions programs are those that view affirmative action in relation to the educational benefits of diversity. They may take various characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or gender into account as potential "plus" factors (among many others) when evaluating candidates, but they do not assign such characteristics an overriding or determinative value. Nor do they aim to achieve specific numerical targets, either through the use of set-asides or quotas. They involve energetic efforts in outreach, but not mandated outcomes. Programs of this kind, when they are carefully designed and implemented, preserve an institution's capacity—with considerable flexibility—to make its own determinations in admissions. This capacity and flexibility have been critical in the past, and will continue to be so in the future.

With these general considerations in mind, let me comment briefly on some of the main arguments that have recently been advanced by thoughtful critics of affirmative action in university admissions:

*1. Affirmative action programs were important during an interim stage as a step toward greater equality of opportunity and the creation of a "level playing field"; but we have now reached a point where discrimination has been so significantly reduced that African Americans (or other historically underrepresented groups) no longer face serious obstacles of this kind.*

There have clearly been increased opportunities for members of historically underrepresented groups in colleges and universities during the past quarter century. Positive steps of this kind, however, are very recent and are far from secure. Twenty-five to thirty years of improved access to higher education is a very brief time span. It is scarcely one generation—barely long enough for graduates of the late 1960s to raise children who are now reaching college age.

To understand more precisely what has been achieved, it is helpful to consider some of the data concerning (for example) African Americans in higher education programs during the past two to three decades. While the focus must remain on the broad concept of diversity as it relates to learning—as distinct from any narrowly quantitative search for "equal outcomes"—such data are useful in assessing the extent of actual progress in achieving diversity during an era when intensified efforts have been made to enhance opportunities for historically underrepresented groups in both undergraduate and graduate education.

- In 1964, only 4 percent of African Americans twenty-five years or older had completed at least four years of college, compared to 10 percent of whites in the same age group. By 1998, the figures had risen to 14.7 percent for African Americans, 25 percent for whites, 11 percent for Hispanics, and 42 percent for Asians—indicating a significant advance by all groups, but also a persistent gap.[19]

  In 1975, African Americans received about 1,000 (3.8%) of the roughly 26,000 doctoral degrees awarded by American universities to U.S. citizens of known race or ethnicity. After periods of modest increase and decline in that percentage, African Americans received about 1,600 (3.7%) of the roughly 45,000 such degrees awarded in 1996. Hispanics received 999 (2.2%). (During this period, the percentage of blacks and Hispanics in the population grew rapidly.)
- If attention is confined to doctorates in the basic arts and sciences disciplines (excluding business, communications, education, and certain other fields), the percentages are smaller—roughly 2 percent in 1975 and 3 percent in 1995. Indeed, in 1995 a total of roughly 850 doctorates were awarded to African Americans (or black permanent residents) in the basic arts and sciences nationwide.[20]
- In the field of law, blacks received 6.7 percent of first professional degrees awarded by American universities in 1994–1995, compared to 4.0 percent in 1976–1977. In medicine, the comparable figure was 5.9 percent in 1994–1995, up from 5.3 percent in 1976–1977. In business, blacks received 5.3 percent of the master's degrees awarded in 1994–1995, up from 3.8 percent in 1976–1977.[21]

However we interpret these statistics—and there are many considerations that must be taken into account—two main conclusions seem to me to be clear.

First, since the advent of affirmative action programs at colleges and universities in the late 1960s and 1970s, there has been marked improvement in the participation of African Americans (as well as other historically underrepresented minorities) in higher education. This is particularly true at the undergraduate level, but there have also been modest gains at some advanced levels.

Second, in spite of these gains, the figures show that we are still very much "in process." There is substantial unrealized potential in each of the different degree programs and fields of study just cited. In addition, the gaps in certain areas are startling, and they highlight critical shortages that are exceptionally troubling from a national point of view. The doctoral situation in the arts and sciences shows only glacial change—from a

very low baseline—over time. While the data for professional education are more encouraging, the overall numbers are not robust, and the representation of African Americans in some fields remains very modest. Successes to date are strongly dependent upon affirmative action. The situation illustrates the need for continued and focused attention in the years ahead.

We need to remember that progress in advanced education depends directly on the gains achieved at previous stages. This is a classic "pipeline" problem, where the linkages in the entire system are crucial, and where a weakening or breakdown at any juncture along the way has major implications for the possibilities at every successive phase. With the outlawing of affirmative action in our two largest states, parts of the pipeline are threatened. Hence, we cannot expect to find in two or three decades noticeably more African Americans (or members of other underrepresented groups) in Ph.D. programs or in professional schools, unless access to excellent undergraduate education remains very strong—and indeed expands.

If the achievements to date are real, they remain too recent, too fragile, and too incomplete for any relaxation of effort. Far from having reached a point where we can feel confident about the gains that have been made since the 1960s, we are still very much in the process of creating the conditions necessary for continuous long-range sustainability. At times in our past, there has been a temptation to believe we had moved beyond the point where continued attention to the particular problems and available opportunities of different racial or ethnic groups was necessary to make further progress in economic and educational areas, but the judgment proved premature.[22] At this moment in our history, we should be mindful of the progress that has been made, but we should not mistake that progress for the full realization of a durable success.

*2. Affirmative action programs, while well-intentioned, are focused on the wrong target. Instead, our attention and resources should be devoted to solving more basic social and economic difficulties, by investing in children's health, improved schools, better housing, and school-to-work transitional programs.*

Large-scale social investments intended to solve social and economic (and educational) problems might well make a significant difference. But I do not see evidence that such investments, on a major scale, are likely to be forthcoming in the near future. Even if they were to be developed, we would need to monitor them over a considerable span of years in order to make certain that they were having a real impact, and that they would be continued.

The question, therefore, is not whether appropriate forms of affirmative action in higher education represent an adequate response to large-scale social problems. Instead, it is whether well-designed and -administered programs can be helpful as one part of a more general approach.

Moreover, to appreciate the full contribution of these programs, we should remember that they have several far-reaching effects beyond any results that can be measured simply in terms of admissions decisions or their ability to contribute to diversity and learning. They stimulate, for example, national outreach efforts that identify talented candidates and expand the pool of qualified applicants from underrepresented groups. Teachers, guidance counselors, and alumni volunteers (among others) participate in this process, which makes clear to young students that increased educational opportunities do in fact exist—in hundreds of institutions, not just a few. This signal itself becomes a powerful catalyst; mobilizing thousands of students who previously saw far less reason for hope.

As we evaluate the effects of affirmative action in higher education, therefore, we should not underestimate the role it plays in launching an entire cycle of activity involving outreach, advice, and professional guidance. It helps to foster aspiration and to convince talented and determined young people that they can in fact find opportunities in higher education.

*3. Affirmative action programs run the risk of stigmatizing and thus injuring the very people they are designed to assist and protect.*

The concern about stigmatization is serious and troubling. Some of the Justices in *Bakke* considered this issue, but clearly did not give it decisive weight. I would place greater importance on this point if it were supported by credible evidence.

In fact, however, there is not a strong consensus, especially among those who have been assisted by affirmative action programs, that the difficulties resulting from stigmatization are sufficiently clear and substantial as to outweigh the increased opportunities and protections. Although opinion is to some extent divided, my own observation suggests that the greater weight of informed views—particularly from members of underrepresented groups—remains substantially in favor of well-designed and carefully administered affirmative action initiatives in admissions, because of their demonstrated positive effects.

The findings of Derek Bok and William Bowen, based on their exhaustive analysis of the undergraduate admissions process and subse-

quent experience of 45,000 students of all races who entered twenty-eight selective colleges in 1976 and 1989, confirms this view. The Bok/Bowen data explode the notion that black students who enter selective colleges and universities with lower high school grades and SAT scores than many of their classmates suffer academically and psychologically because they are "mismatched" with their surroundings. On the contrary, Bok and Bowen found that black students who attended the more selective institutions in their study were more likely to graduate, to earn advanced degrees, to earn high salaries, and to be satisfied with their college experience than black students with similar test scores at less selective institutions. According to Bok and Bowen, "It's time to abandon the idea that well-intentioned college and university admissions officers have somehow sacrificed the interests of the black students whom they have admitted." [23]

*4. Affirmative action programs are inherently unfair because they deny admissions to students with high test scores (or grades) in favor of students with less impressive "objective" records.*

The potential for unfairness exists, and needs to be taken scrupulously into account. That, of course, was the main reason for the Supreme Court's insistence in *Bakke* that any use of racial or ethnic categories must be subject to exacting judicial scrutiny. At the same time, at least two other considerations are important to bear in mind.

First, any definition of qualifications or merit that does not give considerable weight to a wide range of human qualities and capacities will not serve the goal of fairness to individual candidates (quite apart from groups) in admissions. Nor will it serve the fundamental purposes of education. The more narrow and numerical the definition of qualifications, the more likely we are to pass over (or discount) applicants—of many different backgrounds—who possess exceptional talents, attributes, and evidence of promise that are not well measured by standardized tests.

Second, a college or university is responsible first and foremost to the applicants it chooses to admit. This means it must create the best possible educational environment for them. A major consideration in the achievement of this goal is the composition of an entering class—and the entire student body. Admissions decisions are not isolated, atomistic events. They focus on individuals, but each decision is made in the context of others, where the pattern of the whole is also taken into account. This pattern contributes significantly to student diversity—and diversity, as we have seen, is strongly linked to the quality of learning.

The way to proceed in the future is not to introduce absolute prohibitions on the consideration of race (or other factors) in admissions, but to treat such characteristics with the same care and scrupulousness that we have historically given to so many aspects of diversity. That is what we are doing now. That is what we have done in the past—well before the advent of affirmative action programs in the late 1960s.

## Conclusion: Assessment of Diversity in the Full Light of Our History

To sustain our policies in the future will require the same kind of care that we have traditionally devoted to them. It should be recognized at the outset that there is—regrettably—no ideal, friction-free way to arrive at decisions regarding admissions, and no effective way to explain such decisions to the thousands of individuals who are affected by them.

This situation is a direct outgrowth of the post–World War II boom in higher education, and in our collective national expectations concerning full access to educational opportunities. During the past half-century there have been far more applicants than anyone would once have imagined possible. Even if the total number of places in our higher educational system were equal to the number of potential students, many individual colleges and universities would still remain oversubscribed and would have to turn away qualified applicants. Therefore, with or without consideration of race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, income level, or various other factors, there will be thousands of disappointed candidates.

When such a large proportion of applicants is barely distinguishable on statistical grounds, the admissions process must remain essentially human. It must depend on informed judgment rather than numerical indices. And it will be subject to all the inevitable pressures and possible misconceptions that any exceptionally competitive selection process involves.

In order to sustain a balanced, consistent, and highly attentive process, long-established basic principles continue to offer the best guidance.

- Our commitment to excellence means that we will continue to admit students as individuals, based on their merits: on what they have achieved academically, and what they promise to achieve; on their character, and their energy and curiosity and determination; on their willingness to engage in discussion and debate, to entertain the idea that tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect are goals worthy of persons who have been truly educated.

In assessing individual merit, we will—as we have in the past—take a number of criteria into account. Grades, test scores, and class rank will be viewed in the context of each applicant's full set of capabilities, qualities, and potential for future growth and effectiveness.

- Our commitment to excellence also means that we will seek out—in all corners of the nation, and indeed the world—a diversity of talented and promising students.

Such diversity is the substance from which much human learning, understanding, and wisdom derive. It offers one of the most powerful ways of creating the intellectual energy and robustness that lead to greater knowledge, and to the tolerance and mutual respect so essential to the maintenance of our civic society.

In our world today, it is not enough for us and our students to acknowledge, in an abstract sense, that other kinds of people, with other modes of thought and feeling and action, exist somewhere—unseen, unheard, unvisited, and unknown. We must interact directly with a substantial portion of that larger universe. There must be opportunities to hear different views directly—face to face—from people who embody them. No formal academic study can replace continued association with others who are different from ourselves, and who challenge our preconceptions, prejudices, and assumptions, even as we challenge theirs.

- In selecting those students who will be offered places, the whole must be seen as genuinely greater than the sum of the parts.

When an individual student is admitted, the decision is rarely if ever the result of a circumscribed choice between two—or three, or a very few—applicants who are competing for a single place. Once a standard of high quality has been assured, the central question becomes how to admit a collective class capable of teaching and learning from one another.

Such a selection process involves the conscious consideration of different forms of diversity. In this process—as I stated earlier—quotas or set-asides in admissions are not acceptable. By the same token, efforts to prohibit, categorically and absolutely, the consideration of particular characteristics or criteria are no less arbitrary than to accord such factors a completely sheltered, insulated form of protection or status.

In closing, we should not romanticize diversity as we assess its values. But we do need to remember that the character of American society, from its very beginnings, has been shaped by our collective willingness to carry

forward an unprecedented experiment in diversity, the benefits of which have seldom come without friction and strain.

The extent of our nation's success in dealing with diversity can be measured only in the full light of our entire history. Without such a long-term view, as well as an informed awareness of what can be achieved in a heterogeneous society (and at what speed), we will almost certainly undervalue all that has been accomplished so far and be tempted to overdramatize the shock effect of periodic incidents: incidents that can easily be interpreted as evidence of crisis or failure, when in fact they are often no more than signs of the inescapable if unsettling stresses that exist in a large and complex democratic society such as ours.

As we try to assess the progress made to date on our campuses, we ought to ask whether there are ways to evaluate more systematically the degree of success that has so far been realized. Are there concrete lessons that can be learned from the experience of the past quarter century? Are there certain kinds of institutional arrangements, norms, and stated expectations that enhance the experience of diversity and learning for students and others—and are there some that affect it more negatively?

Clearly, we have much more institutional knowledge and experience now than even a decade ago, and far more than we had in 1970. We also have a growing body of alumni (still relatively young) who have graduated since the late 1960s, when Harvard and many other institutions became gradually more inclusive.

The study by Derek Bok and William Bowen provides by far the most comprehensive and data-intensive analysis to date of the experience of this group of students and alumni. The study found that black students at selective institutions are far more likely to graduate from college than either their black or white counterparts nationwide: 75 percent of black students entering selective colleges graduate, as compared with a 40 percent graduation rate for all black college students and a 59 percent rate for white college students. Furthermore, black graduates of selective institutions are far more likely to obtain graduate degrees than blacks nationwide, earn much higher salaries, and are more likely than their white classmates to hold leadership positions in civic and community activities.

The findings of Bok and Bowen are equally strong with respect to qualitative measures of diversity as a dimension of the college experience. Large numbers of both white and black graduates believe that their college experience contributed substantially to their ability to get along and work with members of other races. And almost 80 percent of white graduates feel that their college or university should continue to place as much or more emphasis as it currently does on achieving a diverse student

body. Of the many thousand of students surveyed, Bok and Bowen found that "the vast majority believe that going to college with a diverse body of students made a valuable contribution to their education and personal development."[24] Their qualitative inquiry led them to conclude: "There is overwhelming support for the proposition that the progress made over the last thirty years in achieving greater diversity is to be prized, not devalued."[25]

This kind of data should reinforce the commitment of colleges and universities to sustaining and improving our ongoing national experiment in diversity. Furthermore, as I look at the present situation on many of our campuses, I believe that the achieved level of tolerance and respect among thousands and thousands of students is extraordinary. How many of us would have predicted, in 1950 or 1960, that so great a number of talented and dissimilar students would be studying together and learning from one another after so brief a passage of time? No similar transformation has ever before taken place in the long history of higher education, either in this country or elsewhere.

These achievements have their roots, as we have seen, in ideas and actions that reach back more than a century in our history. The record is impressive. The progress, however imperfect, is inspiring. That is why it is so imperative, at this juncture in our history, that higher education's commitment to diversity be sustained and strengthened. To change course now would be to retreat from decades of difficult but steady hope and fulfillment, to follow pathways far less bright, and far less full of promise.

## Notes

1. Admission Committee Report, 1966–1967, *Official Register of Harvard University*, p. 114.
2. Admission Committee Report, 1964–1965, pp. 100–101.
3. Admission Committee Report, 1963–1964, p. 92.
4. No single opinion represented the views of a majority of the Court, although brief passages of Justice Lewis Powell's pivotal opinion stated the judgment of the Court on the key issues in dispute.
5. *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 291 (1978) (opinion of Powell, J.); see also ibid., 356–362 (opinion of Brennan, J., et al.).
6. Ibid., 320 (opinion of Powell, J.); see also ibid., 356–362 (opinion of Brennan, J., et al.).
7. Ibid., 320; see also ibid., 355–356 (opinion of Brennan, J., et al.).
8. An attempt, for instance, to compensate for previous general "societal discrimination" against minorities was judged by Justice Powell not to be an adequate reason for giving special consideration to minority candidates in admissions, because there had been no determination that the University of California at Davis had itself engaged in discriminatory practices requiring remedial effort. Ibid., 307–310.

Four justices of the Court—those who along with Justice Powell formed the majority concluding that race could be used as a "plus factor" in university admissions—took a different view of the "societal discrimination" issue. Ibid., 362 (opinion of Brennan, J., et al.) ("remedying the effects of past societal discrimination is . . . sufficiently important to justify the use of race-conscious admissions programs where there is a sound basis for concluding that minority underrepresentation is substantial and chronic, and that the handicap of past discrimination is impeding access of minorities" to the university).

9. Ibid., 314.
10. Ibid., 312 (quoting 354 U.S. 234, 263 (1957) (concurring in result)).
11. Ibid., 312 (quoting *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)).
12. Ibid., 313.
13. Ibid., 312 (quoting *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)).
14. Ibid., 316.
15. Ibid., 406.
16. Ibid., 314 (quoting *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629, 634 (1950)).
17. Ibid., 314.
18. Private colleges and universities may well be affected by the decisions in any such cases through provisions of the Civil Rights Act linked to the receipt of federal funds.
19. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1999), table 263, p. 169.
20. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, "Completions" Survey, 1994–1995, and "Consolidated" Survey, 1995, table 4d.
21. Ibid., table 4e; *Digest of Education Statistics 1980* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), tables 111, 112. Degrees awarded to nonresident aliens are not included.
22. See, for example, part III.2 above.
23. Derek Bok and William G. Bowen, press release regarding publication of *The Shape of the River*, Princeton University Press, p. 4.
24. William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 255.
25. Ibid., p. 255.

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